

Monthly Message from the Chief

January 2011

2011 is already shaping up to be a significant year for CAL FIRE. On New Years Day, I had the honor of marching in the "Tournament of Roses Parade" with the CDF Firefighters Honor Guard and Southern Region Chief Dale Hutchinson. Never have I felt more proud of CAL FIRE than I did that day as we walked the six miles past 750,000 spectators and a worldwide television audience. It was truly a shining and history making moment for CAL FIRE.

A week later, on January 10, Governor Brown released his preliminary State budget which incorporates a major realignment of services with local government in order to address California's unprecedented budget deficit. For CAL FIRE, this means the loss of four person staffing and a proposed realignment of fire protection from State to Local responsibility in the most highly populated state responsibility areas (SRA) of California.

It is difficult for all of us to see our staffing reduced and face unknown changes. As we enter this process, however, it is important to remember that the Governor's proposal does not close any CAL FIRE stations and protects the number of CAL FIRE engines available to respond to emergencies throughout California.

The review of the SRA classification is a lengthy, deliberative and thoughtful process and the Executive Team, as well as the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection, are working with all stakeholders, including local government, to make sure the integrity of the State's fire protection system is kept in tact as the process unfolds. I will continue to share updated information with you throughout the budget process.

Although the fiscal situation is never far from our thoughts, I don't want to lose sight of the significant accomplishments we made during 2010:

- 2010 California Fire and Building Standards adopted
- 2010 Strategic Fire Plan for California approved
- The development and approval of a National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) compliant Structural Fire Fighting Hazard and Risk Assessment that will result in a statewide standardized turnout specifications
- The development of the first ever comprehensive Wildland Fire Fighting PPE Hazard and Risk Assessment, which has drawn both local and national attention from fire agencies
- First timber sale awarded on Soquel Demonstration State Forest in 10 years.
- CAL FIRE's response to and subsequent role in mitigating the San Bruno pipeline explosion
- CAL FIRE's response to and subsequent role in mitigating the December flooding in Southern California, including 235 flooding incidents and 56 water rescues

California experienced a relatively mild fire season in 2010 as compared to recent years; however, CAL FIRE responded to 182 more fires than in 2009. CAL FIRE's aggressive initial attack and integrated fire protection with our local government partners continues to minimize loss to lives, property and natural resources. As a result, the amount of area burned was down 55,117 acres from 2009 and well below our 5 year average of 248,896 acres.

It is too early to predict burning conditions and weather patterns for the upcoming spring and summer, however, history has shown that conditions can change rapidly in California's Mediterranean climate and we must always be prepared.

Many of you have asked me over the last several weeks what you can do to help with our budget challenges. The answer is to continue to perform your job to the same high standard and in the same professional manner you do



every day. In addition to responding to the emergency calls for service, this means participating in community events, facilitating meetings, educating landowners, taking someone's blood pressure or simply following up on a request for information. Our continued commitment to go the extra mile and provide the highest level of service to the public will always be our strength and will carry us through these difficult times

Ken Pimlott, Chief
Acting Director